

A photograph of two women smiling and talking in a library or office setting. The woman on the left has short grey hair and wears glasses and a light blue shirt. The woman on the right has dark curly hair and wears a peach-colored scarf and a light-colored top. In the background, there are bookshelves and other people.

The Forensic Interviewer's Toolkit:

CRAFTING EXPERTISE AT EVERY LEVEL

The Forensic Interviewer's **Toolkit:**

CRAFTING EXPERTISE AT EVERY LEVEL

©2025 National Children's Advocacy Center. All rights reserved.

Preferred Citation: Steele, L. C., Brubacher, S., Stewart, H., Rouse, C., Brazil, C., Chamberlin, A., Ghilardi, L., Kirkland-Burke, M., Madden, K., McCulloch, L., Nelson, M. B., Taylor-Porter, K., & Thames, M. (2025). *The forensic interviewer's toolkit: Crafting expertise at every level*. Huntsville, AL: National Children's Advocacy Center.

Contributors

Linda Cordisco Steele, M.Ed., LPC-S
National Children's Advocacy Center

Sonja Brubacher, PhD
Centre for Investigative Interviewing, Griffith
University

Heather Stewart, MA
Children's Justice Center Program
Utah Attorney General's Office

Christina Rouse, MSW
National Children's Advocacy Center

Colleen Brazil, MSW, LIMHP
Project Harmony

Andra Chamberlain, MA
National Children's Advocacy Center

Liz Ghilardi, MSW, LCSW
Children's Wisconsin

Meredith Kirkland-Burke, MSW, RSW
Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Program
Hospital for Sick Children

Kim Madden, M.Ed. LCMHC
National Children's Advocacy Center

Lisa McCulloch, LCSW
Chadwick Center for Children and Families
Rady Children's Hospital

Mary Beth Nelson, LCSW
National Children's Advocacy Center

Kristina Taylor-Porter, MA
Pennsylvania State University
Children's Advocacy Centers of Pennsylvania

Michele Thames, M.Ed.
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Contents

Contributors.....	3
Introduction.....	6
Intent of this Paper.....	7
Development of Forensic Interviewer Core Competencies.....	8
Question Typology.....	9
<i>Question Typology (Level 1)</i>	10
<i>Question Typology (Level 2)</i>	11
<i>Question Typology (Level 3)</i>	11
Protocol Adherence.....	12
<i>Protocol Adherence (Level 1)</i>	12
<i>Protocol Adherence (Level 2)</i>	13
<i>Protocol Adherence (Level 3)</i>	13
Social Support.....	13
<i>Social Support (Level 1)</i>	14
<i>Social Support (Level 2)</i>	14
<i>Social Support (Level 3)</i>	15
Critical Thinking and Decision-Making Throughout the Forensic Interview.....	16
<i>Critical Thinking and Decision-Making (Level 1)</i>	16
<i>Critical Thinking and Decision-Making (Level 2)</i>	16
<i>Critical Thinking and Decision-Making (Level 3)</i>	18
Implementation of Comprehensive Forensic Interview Practices.....	19
Adapting the Forensic Interview for Special Populations.....	20
Accommodations for Engagement and Communication.....	20
Developing Skills to Testify in Court.....	21
Utilizing Research for Practice.....	21
Working with Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Partners.....	22

Skill-Based Coaching for Forensic Interviewers	23
Coaching to the Level of Forensic Interviewer	25
How Coaches Can Help in the Development of a Forensic Interviewer	26
Evaluating Progress	26
Qualifications of Forensic Interviewer Coach	26
Conclusion	28
References	29
Appendix A: Developing Proficiency: Strategies for Skill Development.....	33
Spaced Learning Ongoing Professional Skill Development	33
Peer Review	33
Self-Review.....	34
Appendix B: Navigating Diversity: Adapting Forensic Interviews for Special Populations and Abuse Type	35
Appendix C: Considerations for Testifying in Court	38
Appendix D: Collaborative Strategies: Working Effectively with Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Partners.....	39

Introduction

Whether you're a new forensic interviewer trying to get your feet on the ground with foundational practices or a seasoned interviewer looking to take your practices to the next level, this toolkit is designed for you.

In 2013 a group of dedicated forensic interviewers representing four nationally recognized training programs came together to produce a written document representing our collective thinking about best practices in forensic interviewing. The final product, *Child Forensic Interviewing: Best Practices*, was published in 2015 as an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Juvenile Justice Bulletin. In the ensuing years it has been widely distributed and referenced, providing guidance and support to forensic interviewers that was not protocol-specific but reflected areas of consensus. Research in the nuances of forensic interviewing continues to evolve as well as new areas of challenge for practicing interviewers, such as interviewing potential victims of online victimization, sexual exploitation, and children exhibiting problematic sexual behaviors (Cyr, 2023; Lamb et al., 2018; Poole, 2016). Our thinking about continual skill development and building resilience in forensic interviewers has expanded to include a range of options including, but not limited to, ongoing training, coaching, and supervision as well as peer review.

Ten years later, in 2023, a different, but equally dedicated group of forensic interviewers, met in Huntsville, Alabama, to begin updating the 2013 version of the document that would provide guidance and support while synthesizing past and current research with lessons learned from skilled forensic interview specialists. We respect that conducting forensic interviews of child witnesses is a complex task that asks the interviewer to be sensitive to the developmental abilities, cultural environment, and life experiences (some of them traumatic) while staying within the boundaries of evidence-informed interviewing practice. We want to be clear that there need not be a single protocol to which everyone must adhere but rather that skillful interviewers have many reasons for adapting to the needs of the child, the intricacies of the case under investigation, and the laws of the jurisdiction in which one resides.

Intent of This Paper

Our aim is to create a comprehensive framework for enhancing the proficiency of forensic interviewers. This initiative focuses on delineating core competencies, establishing clear pathways for skill development, defining proficiency levels, guiding effective supervision, and incorporating pertinent considerations, such as testifying in court, working with special populations, and staying abreast of relevant research. By providing a structured approach to skill enhancement, the intent of this paper is to elevate the overall quality and efficacy of forensic-interviewing practices. The hope is that this paper will serve as a basis for forensic interviewers and their skills-based and administrative supervisors to work together to create an individualized development plan that will enhance interviewing skills, provide a structure of support, and opportunities for ongoing training, which can increase job satisfaction and greater competency. Throughout this paper, we use the term “child” rather than “child and adolescent” for convenience. These recommendations can be applied to children through the age of 17 and to interviews with adults with intellectual challenges. This paper is not intended to create a set of standards or benchmarks for measuring the quality of any individual forensic interview. We believe there is no one definitive forensic interview protocol. As stated by Dr. Michael Lamb, “Although the popular protocols all emphasize the reliance on open-ended questions, discourage leading questions and proscribe suggestive questions, what really matters is not what protocol interviewers proclaim to be following but what they say and do in the interviews” (personal communication, 2024). We would add that there is no one true pathway for the skill development of a forensic interviewer.



Development of Forensic Interviewer Core Competencies

Development of Forensic Interviewer Core Competencies

We have identified **four overarching core skills forensic interviewers** are expected to demonstrate throughout the forensic interview:

- **question typology**
- **protocol adherence**
- **social support**
- **critical thinking and decision-making**

In this section, these core skills are explained in more detail with each skill divided into three levels. Categorizing and organizing these skills in this manner will assist forensic interviewers and supervisors in understanding how best to target learning and assessment. This framework may be particularly useful for supervisors in deciding upon targeted goals when delivering feedback. Feedback is helpful to increase learners' motivation, awareness of how much effort is needed for tasks, and task performance. However, research has demonstrated that too much feedback or scattered feedback can be counterproductive (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Lamb et al., 2011). It has been suggested that performance and feedback have a curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) relationship, where moderate levels of feedback are most effective (Lamb et al., 2011). Supervisors should aim to provide targeted feedback that meets the individual interviewer's needs and skill levels (Cordisco Steele, 2018; Powell, 2008). Understanding these three levels can inform effective self-review and direct interviewers to specific skill-development activities.

Question Typology

The past four decades of research have focused on the types of information requests and questions that help a child speak informatively about their experiences while reducing concerns regarding misunderstandings and suggestibility. Research consistently demonstrates that a child, if questioned in a supportive and appropriate manner, can provide productive information in response to open-ended questions (Brown & Lamb, 2015; Brubacher & Powell, 2024).

Questions can be grouped into various categories depending on the kind of information they are designed to elicit. Non-leading, open-ended questions are defined as questions constructed to encourage elaborate responses and allow for the content of the response to be flexible (Powell & Snow, 2007). Interviewers provide minimal direction and ask for an account of an experienced or witnessed event. Additionally, broad wh-questions that begin with "what" or "how" and focus on actions, feelings, and thoughts can encourage an expanded response from a child (Andrews et al., 2015; Lyon & Henderson, 2021).

Specific wh-questions, also known as directives, are designed to elicit specific details that may be missing from the child's account. Children are often unfamiliar with the level of detail required in a forensic interview and may omit information that is central to understanding their experiences.

Option-posing questions such as yes/no and multiple choice are intended to have children either confirm/deny or choose a specific piece of information and usually result in a one-word response. Best practice

indicates that interviewers should follow *wh-* and *yes/no* questions with requests for further elaboration (e.g., Lamb et al., 2018). All question types can be considered leading if they include information not previously raised by the child. When carefully planned ahead of time and thoughtfully crafted, interviewers may introduce reliable information provided from another source; but then return to open questions to gain the child's information. If the child contradicts the information or idea, the interviewer moves forward with other topics. This minimizes the amount of information at risk of being contaminated by the interviewer (Newlin et al., 2015).

Question labels vary across research articles; however, there is consensus that interviewers should maximize the amount of information provided by a child, while reducing questions that may result in inaccurate information. Too many specific *wh-* questions or option-posing questions may shape the child's report of maltreatment or witnessing.

QUESTION TYPOLOGY (LEVEL 1)

We have identified eight subskills related to question typology. Perhaps the most foundational skill to good interviewing is the ability to 1) *recognize the various question types*, including *leading or suggestive questions*, and 2) *understand their intended functions*. Being able to identify question types accurately is strongly predictive of good interviewing (Yii et al., 2014). Different question types have different functions. To choose the most effective question—3) *or avoid a leading question*—at a given moment in the interview, the interviewer must be able to correctly differentiate types of questions. This knowledge helps newer interviewers choose a better question if they can 4) *recognize that a question they asked was ineffective and identify the reason*.

Some question subtypes, particularly the open-ended variety, are not habitually used in everyday conversation; thus, another foundational subskill is 5) *knowing and using at least 2–3 question stems* (e.g., “What happened when...”, “Tell me more about the part where...”) to encourage a narrative account (Benson & Powell, 2015; Brubacher et al., 2019). This preparation prevents questions from sounding repetitive and makes it easier for the interviewer to have them at the “tip of the tongue” rather than allocating cognitive resources in trying to generate a question. Level 1 interviewers should also 6) *recognize the “faux invitation”* or prefacing specific questions with open-ended stems (usually “Tell me...”) to make the question sound open-ended (Henderson et al., 2020). Examples of faux invitations include, “Tell me where everyone was sitting...” and “Tell me what he did with his hand...” Because level 1 interviewers may encounter a child with allegations of repeated abuse, they should also learn to 7) *identify the difference between episodic versus generic (script) language in interviewer questions* and 8) *recognize whether the child's responses indicate episodic or generic detail* (Brubacher et al., 2014).

Level 1 Question Typology Subskills

1. Recognize different question types.
2. Understand the functions of each question type.
3. Avoid the use of a leading/suggestive question.
4. Recognize when a question is ineffective.
5. Know/utilize at least 2–3 questioning stems for encouraging narrative.
6. Recognize faux invitations.
7. Recognize the difference between generic (script) and episodic cueing questions.

QUESTION TYPOLOGY (LEVEL 2)

We have identified seven level 2 question typology subskills which build on level 1 foundational subskills. Interviewers who are now able to reliably identify the various question types and their functions and effects should now *1) use them strategically to target specific informational needs*. For example, if an interviewer needs more detail on a critical aspect of the interview, they can employ a depth question (Feltis et al., 2010) by asking the child an open-ended question to elicit additional information or clarification about statements previously mentioned by the child. This subskill is associated with two additional behaviors: the ability to *adjust questioning strategies a) to meet the child's developmental needs and as well as b) to adapt questioning on a case-specific basis* (e.g., increased pairing of depth prompts with wh-questions for children who may not cope well with very broad invitations) (Hershkowitz et al., 2012). Level 2 interviewers should also be able to *2) efficiently remediate after asking an ineffective question, 3) have a greater repertoire of open-ended question stems, and 4) avoid faux invitations*. Interviewers at this level should also be able to *5) demonstrate the pairing principle* by asking a specific question when necessary and following it up with an open-ended question to encourage elaboration (Lamb et al., 2018). Building on foundational knowledge regarding questioning about repeated events, level 2 interviewers should *6) direct the specificity of their prompts to obtain the information sought*, posing generic questions when eliciting a script account and posing episodic questions when the focus is a single incident. They should also be able to *7) choose and apply effective labels for specific incidents of repeated events* (Brubacher et al., 2014).

Level 2 Question Typology Subskills

1. Effectively utilize different question types to target specific information needs.
 - a. Adjust questioning strategies to meet a child's developmental abilities.
 - b. Adjust questioning strategies to address case-specific elements.
2. Recognize when a question is ineffective and identify how to efficiently remediate it.
3. Utilize a variety of questioning stems to encourage narrative.
4. Avoid faux invitations.
5. Effectively pair narrower questions with open-ended requests that encourage elaboration.
6. Pose generic/script questions when the focus is a script account and pose episodic questions when the focus is a single incident.
7. Use event labeling to obtain episodic-specific details.

QUESTION TYPOLOGY (LEVEL 3)

Because question typology is so fundamental to conducting an effective interview, most of the associated subskills should be already developed in level 1 and level 2 interviewers. Level 3 interviewers continue to *1) develop proficiency in adjusting questioning strategies during all phases of the forensic interview*. Their critical thinking skills regarding question use are well developed at this point, and they can effectively *2) provide feedback to level 1 and 2 interviewers regarding question use*.

Level 3 Question Typology Subskills

1. Develop a greater proficiency in adjusting questioning strategies during all phases of the forensic interview.
2. Provide feedback to level 1 and 2 interviewers regarding question use.

Protocol Adherence

“A forensic interview of a child is a developmentally sensitive and legally sound method of gathering factual information regarding allegations of abuse or exposure to violence. This interview is conducted by a competently trained, neutral professional utilizing research and practice-informed techniques as part of a larger investigative process” (Newlin et al., 2015).

Forensic interview protocols and guidelines are developed to ensure that interviewers are competently trained and are incorporating research and practice-informed techniques (Faller, 2015, 2020; Lamb et al., 2018; Poole, 2016). These protocols (also known as guidelines, frameworks, or structure) provide organization, sample language, recommendations for open-ended questioning, and operationalize the tenets of quality interviewing methods. Previous research demonstrated that when interviewers were simply taught general interviewing principles and left to apply what they learned, they were most often unable to do so and conducted poor-quality interviews despite having received training (Sternberg et al., 2002).

All best practice forensic interview protocols are child-led, incorporating recommended practices, assisting interviewers in asking optimal questions, and avoiding errors that significantly compromise interview quality (Brubacher & Powell, 2024). Protocols typically consist of an introductory or preparatory phase that includes information about the interviewer’s and child’s roles, the room setup, and the conversational expectations explained in a developmentally appropriate manner to the child. This phase of the interview facilitates early rapport-building and includes an opportunity for the child to practice responding to open-ended prompts about a specific past event. Following the introductory phase, best practice protocols provide some suggestions for transitioning to the topic of concern, prioritizing open-ended questions to obtain a narrative account, following up with more specific questions as needed to effectively cue the child, and then respectfully closing the interview.

The field has not developed a standardized protocol and does not recognize one protocol as superior to the others. Many interviewers are trained in more than one protocol and use a blended approach. Jurisdictional requirements, state statutes, and case law influence necessary adaptations to existing protocols. Protocols provide guidance, but the child’s abilities and motivation and the quality of the interview rest heavily on the skillset and decision-making of the interviewer.

PROTOCOL TYPOLOGY (LEVEL 1)

It is well understood that following an interview protocol or guide can help interviewers use their skills more effectively (Lamb et al., 2007; La Rooy et al., 2015; Powell & Brubacher, 2020). Level 1 interviewers should be able to 1) *articulate the steps in their interview structure* and 2) *consistently execute the protocol steps during the forensic interview.*

Level 1 Protocol Typology Subskills

1. Articulate the steps in your interview structure.
2. Consistently execute protocol steps during the forensic interview.

PROTOCOL TYPOLOGY (LEVEL 2)

While level 1 interviewers should have enough training to be able to use a structured interview protocol, level 2 interviewers should demonstrate proficiency in 1) *understanding the purpose behind the individual protocol steps* and 2) *the overall interview structure*. This knowledge helps level 2 interviewers defend their interviews and begin to consider circumstances under which their protocol steps or structure might need adaptation (see Powell & Brubacher, 2020). Thus, level 2 interviewers should also be able to 3) *consider input from their team and potential protocol adaptations during interview planning*.

Level 2 Protocol Typology Subskills

1. Understand the why behind your protocol steps.
2. Be able to articulate the why behind your structure.
3. Consider team input and adapt the protocol structure before the interview.

PROTOCOL TYPOLOGY (LEVEL 3)

Level 3 interviewers will have a solid foundation for understanding the research and rationale behind their protocol steps and structure, such that they can 1) *articulate when adaptations to a protocol are indicated*. These experienced interviewers should 2) *consider developmental differences, trauma history, culture, special populations, and other case-specific factors when adapting a protocol*. Although level 3 interviewers will still consult with their teams and engage in pre-interview planning, level 3 interviewers, with their extensive knowledge and experience, can be expected to 3) *consider team input and adapt the protocol structure as needed during the interview, as challenges arise*.

Level 3 Protocol Typology Subskills

1. Articulate when adaptations to a protocol are indicated.
2. Incorporate case-specific factors, such as developmental differences, trauma history, culture, and special populations, into protocol adaptation decision-making.
3. Consider team input and adapt the protocol structure during the interview as needed.

Social Support

A child does not typically come to a forensic interview in an affectively neutral state and may be in various stages of disclosure regarding an experience of abuse. They may bring a complex set of emotions that exert significant impact on engagement, memory recall, and informative capacity. A maltreated child's willingness to describe their experiences will vary based on their age, the severity of the abuse, and the

responses of those around them to their disclosure.

Although early child forensic interview protocols focused heavily on addressing cognitive needs, contemporary research has consistently demonstrated the positive impact of social support on a child's engagement and informativeness, even in response to suggestive or leading questions (Ahern et al., 2019; Blasbalg et al., 2018; Saywitz et al., 2019). The use of social support, when paired with open-ended questions seeking narrative information without selectively reinforcing statements made by the child, increases the amount of forensically relevant information a child may provide in the forensic interview (Blasbalg et al., 2019).

Interviewers should attend to the child throughout each stage of the forensic interview and provide the necessary social support, paying special attention to a child who expresses or demonstrates reluctance during the interview. Social support may be given in the form of interviewer body language, effective rapport-building to engage the child, increased time spend in building rapport, statements made by the interviewer during all phases of the interview, questions asked to better understand the child's needs, and appropriate pacing and use of silence throughout the interview.

SOCIAL SUPPORT (LEVEL 1)

Even while learning question typology and protocol adherence, level 1 interviewers should be able to provide a child with basic social support. We have identified five subskills for level 1 interviewers regarding social support. Level 1 interviewers should be able to 1) articulate the different types of verbal and non-verbal support and 2) attend to the child's presence and broad emotional needs. This means that *that level 1 interviewers will have learned about the various behaviors that can be used to offer support and can notice when a child might be upset, for example. Level 1 interviewers will be able to recognize 3) non-verbal indications of emotional states (Karni-Visel et al., 2023) and 4) emotional dysregulation and respond effectively. Finally, given the nature of vicarious trauma and burnout among forensic interviewers, level 1 interviewers should be taught how to 5) identify their own internal challenges while remaining present during the forensic interview (Middleton et al., 2022; Starcher, 2019).*

Level 1 Social Support Subskills

1. Articulate different types of social support.
2. Attend to the child's current emotional needs.
3. Recognize non-verbal indications of emotional states and respond effectively.
4. Recognize indications of dysregulation in the child.
5. Identify your own internal challenges while remaining present during the forensic interview.

SOCIAL SUPPORT (LEVEL 2)

At level 2, interviewers' questioning skills and knowledge of supportive behaviors are well developed. At this stage, interviewers will have more resources available to them to recognize and respond to the child being interviewed. The use of social support is often a delicate balancing act. Providing the appropriate amount of social support throughout the interview is a skill that interviewers develop over time. We have identified seven subskills related to social support for level 2 interviewers. Level 2 interviewers will be able to 1) *provide well-timed emotional inquiry*, checking in on how the child is feeling in the forensic interview. The timing of this inquiry should result from the ability to 2) *recognize shifts in the child's affective states*. When level 2 interviewers perceive the need to adapt their process based on the child's emotional needs, they should be able to 3) *respond in a manner that is appropriate and defensible*. Thus, the level 2

interviewer is taking the basic knowledge learned in level 1 and applying it effectively.

Level 2 interviewers will be able to recognize that rapport-building is not just an activity at the beginning of the interview, but rather a continual, dynamic process. An important social support subskill is to 4) *demonstrate efficiency and flexibility in rapport-building and maintenance*, recognizing and repairing breakdowns in communication. Level 2 interviewers will also be able to 5) *identify a child's disclosure thresholds*; that is, recognizing that a child is either not ready to disclose at all, or they may be willing to talk about only limited elements of their maltreatment/witness experiences. Finally, level 2 interviewers can continue to develop ways to care for the child and themselves during the interview process by 6) *engaging in appropriate co-regulation when the child becomes upset*, and 7) *strategically managing their own internal challenges*.

Level 2 Social Support Subskills

1. Articulate different types of social support.
2. Identify and effectively communicate shifts in the child's affective states.
3. Respond in a manner that is appropriate and defensible to the child's emotional needs.
4. Demonstrate efficiency and flexibility in rapport-building and maintenance.
5. Recognize a child's disclosure threshold.
6. Engage in appropriate co-regulation when a child becomes upset.
7. Identify one's own internal challenges with remaining present and maintaining best practice during the forensic interview.

SOCIAL SUPPORT (LEVEL 3)

Like the other core skills, level 3 interviewers will use their existing competencies to manage the most challenging situations and to provide mentorship to other interviewers. We identified two key subskills for level 3 interviewers that demonstrate the core skill of social support. Level 3 interviewers will 1) *effectively adjust their strategies to meet the needs of highly reluctant and traumatized children*. For example, this could mean planning for extended contact or lengthier rapport-building (e.g., Duron & Remko, 2020; Hershkowitz et al., 2021). These highly skilled interviewers will also 2) *provide mentorship to other forensic interviewers in recognizing and managing their internal challenges while remaining present and maintaining best practices during the forensic interview*.

Level 3 Social Support Subskills

1. Effectively adjust social support strategies to meet the needs of highly reluctant, traumatized children.
2. Mentor other forensic interviewers in developing/monitoring their own internal challenges while remaining present and maintaining best practices during the forensic interview.

Critical Thinking and Decision-Making Throughout the Forensic Interview

Critical thinking is defined as the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue to form a judgment or make decisions. Initial training in forensic interviewing primarily focuses on learning and adherence to a protocol, but even the most structured protocols are intended to be flexible (Cyr, 2023; Hope et al., 2022; Lamb et al., 2018). As forensic interviewers master the protocol, their development moves to critical thinking and decision points within the forensic interview, and they must be able to articulate their decisions, especially if their decisions diverge from their protocol.

Forensic interviewing is an art and a science in that the interviewer is continually assessing the information received as well as the emotional well-being of the child. This assessment results in various decision points throughout the interview. Decisions start before the interviewer enters the room with the child through pre-interview preparation and planning. Areas to consider pre-interview include the nature of the allegations and how the report was initiated, considerations regarding the child's developmental functioning, culture, and trauma history. Known alternative explanations should be reviewed. During the pre-substantive phase, decisions are made regarding the child's comfort, language skills, cognitive processes, and possible communication barriers for the child. When and how to transition to the topic of the incident is also considered. In the substantive phase of the interview, decisions revolve around addressing barriers, gathering information (e.g., how much is enough information from the child?), and continuing to assess the child's emotional well-being. Afterward, it is imperative that interviewers critically evaluate some of their interviews to review decision points within the interview and to assess whether the decisions that were made yielded the desired result. As the interviewer learns to review their interviews with a critical lens, their critical thinking skills will continue to evolve and develop.

CRITICAL THINKING AND DECISION-MAKING (LEVEL 1)

As level 1 interviewers are focused on asking good questions, adhering to protocol, and offering social support, they may have little available cognitive resources to think critically during the interview (Kaminske, 2019). As a result, the four subskills we have identified for level 1 interviewers center around pre- and early-interview activities. During interview planning, level 1 interviewers will attempt to use pre-interview information to 1) *predict potential challenges*, 2) *develop effective alternative hypotheses*, and 3) *recognize potential infiltration of their own biases*. Once the interview has begun, level 1 interviewers should also be expected to 4) *judge when initial rapport-building has been adequate*.

Level 1 Critical Thinking and Decision-Making Subskills

1. Utilize pre-interview information to predict potential challenges.
2. Develop effective alternative hypotheses during interview planning.
3. Recognize potential infiltration of biases during interview planning.
4. During the interview, recognize indications of adequate rapport-building.

CRITICAL THINKING AND DECISION-MAKING (LEVEL 2)

With a solid foundation in interviewing skills, level 2 interviewers can turn their attention to decision-making throughout the interview. We identified seven subskills for the level 2 interviewer related to critical thinking and decision-making. Level 2 interviewers will 1) *consider a wide range of available*

pre-interview information to inform multiple decisions throughout the interview, for example, a) developmental differences; potential barriers; mental health diagnoses; disclosure dynamics, which may prompt changes, such as room setup, transition decisions, and the type of questions to meet a child's developmental needs. In this way, interviewers at this skill level are applying specific case features to interview strategies. Level 2 interviewers will also be able to 2) anticipate and manage expectations from the investigative team, concerning the information sought in the interview. Level 2 interviewers will be able to balance the need to manage these expectations with 3) the awareness of goals for the interview or any biases on the part of team members during pre-interview and intra-interview (i.e., a break, or check-in, during the interview) team conferences.

Navigating the disclosure (if there is one) can be the trickiest part of the interview, particularly when the child does not outcry immediately, compelling the interviewer to decide how to go about eliciting key details (Garcia et al., 2022). As such, key subskills for level 2 interviewers are 4) *effectively navigating early, late, and non-disclosure pathways for moderately challenging interview situations, and 5) navigating to next steps once the child has reached the disclosure threshold* (e.g., planning to bring the child back). With particularly reluctant children, the decision to end the interview session after the rapport stage and continue the interview on a different day, offering social support during both sessions, may be the most effective strategy (Hershkowitz et al., 2021).

If the child does disclose, level 2 interviewers will be able to obtain a narrative account of what happened and then 6) *identify details that are absent from the narrative and pose effective follow-up questions to gather required details*. Finally, level 2 interviewers will be able to 7) *testify regarding the interview during criminal/civil legal proceedings*.

Level 2 Critical Thinking and Decision-Making Subskills

1. Consider available pre-interview information to inform multiple decisions throughout the interview.
 - a. Consider how specific case factors might map onto interview strategies.
2. Anticipate and manage expectations from the investigative team.
3. Be aware of any specific goals or biases on the part of team members during pre-interview and intra-interview (break) team conferences.
4. Effectively navigate early, late, and non-disclosure pathways for moderately challenging interview situations.
5. Navigate the next steps once the child has reached the disclosure threshold.
6. Identify details that are absent from a child's account narrative and pose effective follow-up questions to gather additional details.
7. Provide factual testimony regarding the interview during criminal/civil legal proceedings.

CRITICAL THINKING AND DECISION-MAKING (LEVEL 3)

The most skilled and experienced interviewers are best able to engage in critical thinking about the forensic interview as they have learned and practiced the low-level skills to a degree of mastery and acquired knowledge about the underlying reasons for various interview strategies and phases (see Kaminske, 2019). We have identified four subskills related to critical thinking and decision-making for the level 3 interviewer. 1) *The effective management of the infiltration of team member goals/biases during pre-interview and intra-interview (break or check-in) team conferences is a high-level behavior.* It rests on the level 2 foundation of awareness of biases, but it requires an interviewer who has experience in critically applying knowledge to adapt interviews to various contexts, confidently managing goals and biases while protecting the fidelity of the forensic interview. Such an interviewer will 2) *navigate early, late, and non-disclosure pathways for highly challenging interview situations.* Level 3 interviewers can also be expected to 3) *provide expert witness testimony regarding a wide range of forensic interview-related topics* and 4) *respond effectively and comprehensively to defense expert reports.*

Level 3 Critical Thinking and Decision-Making Subskills

1. Effectively manage infiltration of team member goals/biases during pre-interview and intra-interview (break) team conferences.
2. Navigate early, late, and non-disclosure pathways for more significantly challenging interview situations.
3. Provide expert witness testimony regarding a wide range of forensic interview-related topics.
4. Respond effectively and comprehensively to defense expert reports.



Implementation of Comprehensive Forensic Interview Practices

Implementation of Comprehensive Forensic Interview Practices

Core concepts and foundational building blocks are essential for forensic interviewers beginning their careers. Outside of learning a specific forensic interviewing protocol, there are additional components that forensic interviewers should be aware of. Forensic interviewers should be cognizant of the following: adapting the forensic interview for special populations, utilizing tools, providing testimony, applying research to practice, and working with multidisciplinary team (MDT) partners. Expanding one's knowledge in these supplementary domains can augment an interviewer's scope and depth of understanding, thereby fostering a practice firmly rooted in evidence-based research and pragmatic implementation.

Adapting The Forensic Interview For Special Populations

While adherence to a forensic interview protocol is critical to conducting good, evidence-based interviews, understanding how to adapt the forensic interview protocol to specific populations is a key component of skill development for forensic interviewers. Taking into consideration both individual and case-specific elements should inform how the interviewer prepares for and conducts the interview. As a supervisor, it is crucial to consider the level of your forensic interviewers when assigning cases, ensuring they are matched appropriately and not tasked with cases that exceed their current skill set. Interviewing a child with a disability that impacts their physical, cognitive, social, and communicative abilities may require specialized training and additional supervision. For example, different tactics and skills would be used when interviewing a child who does not speak and adults with developmental challenges. Before an interviewer attempts these cases, specialized training and guidance are necessary.

Historically, child forensic interviews were designed to gather complete and accurate information from children regarding allegations of sexual abuse and serious physical abuse. As the application of the forensic interview has expanded, interviewers must be educated in the unique aspects of a variety of types of cases, which can include child sexual exploitation and trafficking, severe neglect/torture, witness to homicide/domestic violence or mass casualty incidents, and youth with problematic sexual behavior. Not only do cases come with their own unique variables, but a child may have suffered multiple forms of abuse or maltreatment. There may be times when a case requires a follow-up interview because the child may be experiencing fatigue or distress due to the complexity of the case or showing reluctance to disclose. Interviewers should be able to articulate the reason for an additional interview and continue to use best-practice questioning strategies.

Note: Refer to Appendix B, "Navigating Diversity: Adapting Forensic Interviews for Special Populations and Abuse Type," for further details on special populations and abuse types.

Accommodations For Engagement And Communication

A significant number of children struggle with the verbal demands of a forensic interview. These difficulties can be rooted in their developmental/information processing and/or linguistic capacities. Reluctance to articulate emotionally distressing content can also impact a child's capacity to provide detailed verbal accounts of their experiences. Embarrassment or shame about using certain words can be a challenge, even at times for adolescents as well as younger children. Nonverbal interview techniques such as drawing or written responses, may assist reluctant children in providing additional information or

clarification while minimizing some of the risk of using option posing questions or recognition tools. Early research is promising for the inclusion of an invitation to “draw the event you just told me about” which can facilitate a child providing additional details and giving a more complete report (Katz & Hershkowitz, 2010). Drawing the location of the abusive event may allow a child to explain positioning or provide additional corroborative elements to their previous verbal account. Drawing should be included only to facilitate further verbal description by the child and never used in an interpretative manner. Current research is limited but indicates more benefits than risks when included in interviews that otherwise follow evidence-based questioning strategies (Derksen & Connolly, 2022). Interviewers should be knowledgeable of jurisdictional preferences and use accommodation on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the investigative team. Overreliance on recognition-based interview tools is problematic because tools are generally associated with an increase in children’s errors coupled with no corresponding increase in productivity, and poorer questions from the interviewer (Poole & Bruck, 2012; Wolfman et al., 2018). Abuse related drawings or writing should be treated as evidence and properly maintained..

Developing Skills To Testify In Court

Forensic interviewers testifying as witnesses during court proceedings is becoming more common. Forensic interviewer testimony may be utilized to educate the court and/or provide specific information relevant to the case. Developing good testifying skills is vital for forensic interviewers to feel confident and prepared when taking the stand. An interviewer early in their career might be anxious and overwhelmed with the thought of testifying. Adequate preparation with supervisors and the prosecutor will assist the interviewer in understanding their role in a particular case and feeling competent. Opportunities to observe more experienced forensic interviewers testify as well as role-play can be helpful.

Note: There are additional suggestions for testifying outlined in Section 5 of the [Legal Guidebook for Children’s Advocacy Centers](#), (Agatston, 2023) and refer to Appendix D of this paper, “In the Legal Spotlight: Considerations for Testifying in Court,” for additional considerations for forensic interviewer testimony prep.

Utilizing Research For Practice

The evolution of forensic interviewing over the past four decades has been closely tied to research advancements in various areas, such as child abuse dynamics, disclosure processes, child development, trauma impact, and question effectiveness. This evolution calls for interviewers to continually work toward the increased knowledge and understanding of the application of research findings to ensure evidence-based practice during the forensic interview. Continuous engagement with the ongoing research enables forensic interviewers to refine their skills, address emerging challenges, and uphold high standards, contributing to the advancement of the field.

The following are some suggestions for locating and incorporating research into forensic interview practice:

- *Be knowledgeable about where to find research ([Child Abuse Library Online \[CALIO™\]](#), and [American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children \[APSAC\]](#)) offer interviewers opportunities to join spaces where research is shared (peer review, journal clubs, etc.).*
- *Ensure that interviewers have time and space to be curious about research.*
- *Incorporate research into professional development learning opportunities.*

Working With Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Partners

“Forensic interviews are best conducted within a multidisciplinary team context, as coordinating an investigation has been shown to increase the efficiency of the investigation while minimizing system-induced trauma in the child” (Newlin et al., 2015, p. 10).

The forensic interviewer is responsible for communicating and consulting with the MDT members involved in the case, prior to, during, and after the forensic interview. Issues addressed should include a basic understanding of the allegations, where the child is in the disclosure process, any case-specific concerns, possible developmental challenges or mental health issues for the child, and any potential bias from the interviewer or MDT. To effectively address the MDT’s needs, the interviewer must understand the purpose of the forensic interview from the team’s perspective.

Note: Refer to Appendix E, “Collaborative Strategies: Working Effectively with Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Partners,” for additional considerations for MDT collaboration.



Skill-Based Coaching for Forensic Interviewers

Skill-Based Coaching For Forensic Interviewers

Administrative supervision is a hierarchical relationship in which one oversees and directs the work and performance of a subordinate. The primary focus of administrative supervision is to ensure that tasks are carried out effectively, adhering to the organization's policies and goals. If the administrative supervisor has a background in forensic interviewing, the same person may teach, monitor, support, and evaluate the forensic interviewer's performance. Skills-based supervision, mentoring or coaching, contributes greatly to good practice and job satisfaction. For the purposes of this paper, we have elected to use the term "coaching."

The International Coaching Federation defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. The process of coaching often unlocks previously untapped sources of imagination, productivity and leadership" (International Coaching Federation, 2024).

Williams and Lee (2021) also provided a definition. "Coaching is a professional relationship between a client and a coach designed to help the client increase self-awareness, generate learning, and identify and accomplish meaningful goals" (p. 11).

Coaching provides a vital means of support and reflection for forensic interviewers. This is a structured process that allows interviewers to receive feedback, gain fresh perspectives, and enhance their skills and competencies. As we know, interviewing children is a difficult task, and best practices tend to diminish over time (Brubacher et al., 2020; Lamb, 2016; Powell, 2013). Coaching is one way to support interviewers in adhering to the skills they learned in foundational training and promoting critical thinking to adapt to increasingly complex cases. Pryce et al. (2007) found throughout the literature that human service professionals leave employment most often due to lack of supportive supervision (coaching) and stay in a position longer, with better outcomes, when a supervisor (coach) is supportive.

Recognizing that not all organizations have the same access to resources, forensic interviewers should attempt to secure some form of skill-based coaching. This may be done in a variety of ways; however, holding oneself accountable for continued growth and development through coaching is important.

Coaches are often supervisors or mentors, and their success is highly dependent on the support of the organization and the structure around this role. Coaching must be valued, as demonstrated by developing capacity and protecting the interviewer's time. Here are some considerations for developing this position in-house:

- Cultivate connections with others in the state, region, and network.
- If coaching is being provided to non-Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) staff, define structures and develop guidelines.

If you do not have capacity for an in-house coach:

- Utilize Chapters and Regional Children's Advocacy Centers (RCACs) to find creative ways to fill this need.
- Consider contacting neighboring CACs, consultants, etc.

If forensic interviewers are not housed in a CAC, the approach to coaching the interviewer may require a different structure and additional support. Getting buy-in from the outside organization is essential. The

article, “Difficulties Translating Research on Forensic Interview Practices to Practitioners: Finding Water, Leading Horses, but Can We Get Them to Drink?” (Lamb, 2016), emphasizes how crucial ongoing coaching is for those conducting forensic interviews and can be a valuable resource for organizational leaders to read.

Coaching To The Level Of Forensic Interviewer

Being a brand-new forensic interviewer having never worked in the CAC field, conducted forensic interviews, or worked with an MDT can feel overwhelming. Coaching should vary depending on the needs of the individual. More support is necessary early in a career and the support will shift and change as the individual becomes more confident and proficient in their skills and position. Coaching will vary depending on the interviewer’s level, and it will be important to have patience with new interviewers and tolerate the learning curve to allow them to succeed in their roles. As mentioned in the “Development of Forensic Interviewer Core Competencies” section, interviewers fall into three levels depending on their skills. Interviewers may not fit solidly into one category depending on the skill or type of case. It is suggested that coaches have a thorough understanding of their interviewer’s level to provide targeted, effective support that facilitates growth and is consistent with their level of experience and capability.

Level	Coaching Objective
Level 1	Focus on providing feedback in a structured continuous manner around the development of the core competencies and adherence to the protocol.
Level 2	Focus on developing critical thinking skills, providing social support to the child during the interview, and addressing interviewer bias. Interviewers will begin to gain more confidence during this phase so reflective supervision strategies should be considered.
Level 3	Focus on greater proficiency in adjusting questioning strategies, managing infiltration of MDT goals/biases, addressing internal struggles, and providing opportunities for further professional development.

In addition to understanding the areas that need focus, coaches also must have an implementation plan.

Activities	Observe live interviews: Coach the new interviewer before, during, and after the interview and mitigate the anxiety of MDT observers.
	Review recordings: Pause to discuss portions of the interview.
	Have a new interviewer observe live interviews of other senior interviewers.
	Participate in one-on-one peer review conducted by an expert interviewer.
	Transcribe interviews for self and other review.
	Code interviews (self and others).
	Conduct simulated or mock interviews.

How Coaches Can Help In The Development Of A Forensic Interviewer

Effective coaching should encourage **deliberate or deep practice** to improve technique. Coaches should assist interviewers in breaking skills into smaller components with ample repetition. When this is complemented with a steady stream of constructive and concrete feedback, interviewers can address their weaknesses and maximize their strengths.

Coaches should help interviewers **fully understand their interview protocol**. They should also aid interviewers in defending or articulating any necessary diversions and educate interviewers about issues not directly addressed by the protocol.

Coaches can also suggest the **assignment of interviews**. Initially, perhaps a level 1 interviewer could be assigned cases of active disclosure, one-time events, and witness interviews. As the interviewer's skill and confidence increase, preschoolers and more complex cases can be added. Additionally, coaches can debrief to help mitigate secondary traumatic stress or recommend that interviewers temporarily be taken out of rotation after a very impactful interview.

Coaches can support interviewers when they experience **tension with their MDT**. It feels frustrating and overwhelming when the MDT disagrees or is dissatisfied with the interviewer. When this occurs, interviewers tend to catastrophize or globalize the situation and think the relationship is beyond repair. Coaches play a key role in helping interviewers navigate these situations and keep things in perspective.

Evaluating Progress

Interviewers progress at different intervals. Some need a lot of support for a longer period and some interviewers need less support as time goes on. An effective coach will know how to evaluate an interviewer's progress to ensure that the forensic interview services being offered are in alignment with best practices and not causing harm to the clients and MDT. A coach can set up a "development plan" with each interviewer to track progress and monitor development.

Qualifications Of Forensic Interviewer Coach

An ideal person providing skill-based forensic interview coaching should strive to possess these qualities:

- Actively interviewing children
- Cross-trained in multiple forensic interviewing models
- Extensive experience and competence in interviewing children
- Demonstrated high-quality child interviewing experience with diverse case dynamics
- Engaged in ongoing training/learning opportunities in the field
- Involved in other venues of the forensic interviewing field (with Chapters, RCAC initiatives, training, workgroups, national groups, etc.)
- Experience engaging and problem-solving with MDT partners

Note: This is not an all-inclusive list; individuals might have some of these qualities and could acquire more to become a more well-rounded coach.

With the forensic interview being a pivotal piece of the larger MDT investigation, a lack of proper coaching can have larger-scale impacts on clients, families, alleged offenders, and the community. An unqualified person providing coaching can have detrimental effects on the interviewer. Initial protocol training is not enough and should be just the beginning of an interviewer's learning journey. Coaching that is offered by unqualified people has the potential to reinforce behaviors that do not align with current practices or jurisdictional requirements. This could hinder an interviewer from elevating their skills and advancement through the core competencies.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined considerations for enhancing the skill development of forensic interviewers. By delineating core competencies, establishing pathways for skill development, defining proficiency levels, guiding effective supervision, and incorporating pertinent considerations, such as testifying in court and working with special populations, this paper provides a structured approach to skill enhancement. Through these efforts, the aim is to elevate the overall quality and efficacy of forensic interviewing practices while recognizing **there is no one true pathway for the skill development of a forensic interviewer, and it is not expected that you implement all the suggestions outlined in this paper.** As forensic interviewers continue to refine their skills and adapt to emerging challenges, it is imperative to uphold the highest standards in the field, ensuring the delivery of accurate, ethical, and effective forensic interviews.

References

- Agatston, A. (2023). *Legal guidebook for Children's Advocacy Centers*. Huntsville, AL: National Children's Advocacy Center.
- Andrews, S. J., Lamb, M. E., & Lyon, T. D. (2015). Question types, responsiveness, and self-contradictions when prosecutors and defense attorneys question alleged victims of sexual abuse. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 29*, 253–261. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3103>
- Benson, M. S., & Powell, M. B. (2015). Evaluation of a comprehensive interactive training system for investigative interviewers of children. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 21*(3), 309–322. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000052>
- Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2018). Support, reluctance, and production in child abuse investigative interviews. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 24*(4), 518–527. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000183>
- Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Karni-Visel, Y., & Ahern, E. C. (2019). Is interviewer support associated with the reduced reluctance and enhanced informativeness of alleged child abuse victims? *Law and Human Behavior, 43*(2), 156–165. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000303>
- Brown, D. A., & Lamb, M. E. (2015). Can children be useful witnesses? It depends how they are questioned. *Child Development Perspectives, 9*(4), 250–255. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12142>
- Brubacher, S. P., Benson, M. S., Powell, M. B., Goodman-Delahunty, J., & Westera, N. J. (2020). An overview of best practice investigative interviewing of child witnesses of sexual assault. In I. Bryce & W. Petherick (Eds.), *Child sexual abuse: Forensic issues in evidence, impact, & management* (pp. 445–466). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-819434-8.00022-2>
- Brubacher, S. P., Poole, D. A., Dickinson, J. J., La Rooy, D., Szojka, Z. A., & Powell, M. B. (2019). Effects of interviewer familiarity and supportiveness on children's recall across repeated interviews. *Law and Human Behavior, 43*(6), 507–516. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000346>
- Brubacher, S. P., & Powell, M. B. (2024). An overview of best practices for interviewing children. In D. Walsh, R. Bull, & I. Areh (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook on investigative interviewing and interrogation* (pp. 397–412). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003424444>
- Brubacher, S. P., Powell, M. B., & Roberts, K. P. (2014). Recommendations for interviewing children about repeated experiences. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 20*(3), 325–335. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000011>
- Brubacher, S. P., Shulman, E. P., Bearman, M. J., & Powell, M. B. (2022). Teaching child investigative interviewing skills: Long-term retention requires cumulative training. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 28*(1), 123–136. <https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000332>
- Cederborg, A. C., Lindholm, T., Lamb, M., & Norrman, E. (2021). Evaluating the quality of investigative interviews conducted after the completion of a training program. *Investigative Interviewing: Research and Practice, 11*(1), 40–52.
- Coaching. (2024, August 7). In *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coaching>

- Cordisco Steele, L. (2018). *Continuous skill building for forensic interviewers: A Research-to-Practice summary*. Huntsville, AL: National Children's Advocacy Center.
- Cyr, M. (2023). *Conducting interviews with child victims of abuse and witnesses of crime: A practical guide*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003265351>
- Derksen, D., & Connolly, D. A. (2023). Drawing conclusions: Instructing witnesses to draw what happened to them. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, 20(1), 48–62. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jip.1604>
- Donovan, J. J., & Radosevich, D. J. (1999). A meta-analytic review of the distribution of practice effect: Now you see it, now you don't. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84(5), 795–805. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.84.5.795>
- Duron, J. F., & Remko, F. S. (2020). Considerations for pursuing multiple session forensic interviews in child sexual abuse investigations. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 29(2), 138–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2018.1504263>
- Faller, K. C. (2020). Forensic interview protocols: An update on the major forensic interview structures. *APSAC Advisor*, 52(2), 4–10.
- Faller, K. C. (2015). Forty years of forensic interviewing of children suspected of sexual abuse, 1974–2014: Historical benchmarks. *Social Sciences*, 4(1), 34–65. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci4010034>
- Feltis, B. B., Powell, M. B., Snow, P. C., & Hughes-Scholes, C. H. (2010). An examination of the association between interviewer question type and story-grammar detail in child witness interviews about abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34(6), 407–413. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.09.019>
- Garcia, F. J., Brubacher, S. P., & Powell, M. B. (2022). How interviewers navigate child abuse disclosure after an unproductive start in forensic interviews. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy, and Practice*, 5(3), 375–397. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-022-00121-0>
- Henderson, H. M., Russo, N., & Lyon, T. D. (2020). Forensic interviewers' difficulty with invitations: Faux invitations and negative recasting. *Child Maltreatment*, 25(3), 363–372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559519895593>
- Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Blasbalg, U., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2021). The dynamics of two-session interviews with suspected victims of abuse who are reluctant to make allegations. *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(2), 739–747. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579420001820>
- Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Katz, C., & Horowitz, D. (2012). The development of communicative and narrative skills among preschoolers: Lessons from forensic interviews about child abuse. *Child Development*, 83(2), 611–622. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01704.x>
- Hope, L., Anakwah, N., Antfolk, J., Brubacher, S. P., Flowe, H., Gabbert, Giebels, E., Kanja, W., Korkman, J., Kyo, A., Naka, M., Otgaar, H., Powell, M. B., Selim, H., Skrifvars, J., Sorkpah, I. K., Sowatey, E. A., Steele, L. C., Stevens, L. ... & Anonymous. (2022). Urgent issues and prospects at the intersection of culture, memory, and witness interviews: Exploring the challenges for research and practice. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 27(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lcrp.12202>
- International Coaching Federation. (2024). *All things coaching*. <https://coachingfederation.org/about>
- Katz, C., & Hershkowitz, I. (2010). The effects of drawing on children's accounts of sexual abuse. *Child Maltreatment*, 15(2), 171–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559509351742>
- Kaminske, A. N. (2019, February 28). *Can we teach critical thinking?* The Learning Scientists. <https://www.learningscientists.org/blog/2019/2/28/can-we-teach-critical-thinking>
- Karni-Visel, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., & Blasbalg, U. (2023). Nonverbal emotions while disclosing child abuse: The role of interviewer support. *Child Maltreatment*, 28(1), 66–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10775595211063497>

- Kluger, A. N., & DeNisi, A. (1996). The effects of feedback interventions on performance: A historical review, a meta-analysis, and a preliminary feedback intervention theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, *119*(2), 254–284. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.119.2.254>
- Lam, C. F., DeRue, D. S., Karam, E. P., & Hollenbeck, J. R. (2011). The impact of feedback frequency on learning and task performance: Challenging the “more is better” assumption. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *116*(2), 217–228. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2011.05.002>
- Lamb, M. E. (2016). Difficulties translating research on forensic interview practices to practitioners: Finding water, leading horses, but can we get them to drink? *American Psychologist*, *71*(8), 710–718. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000039>
- Lamb, M. E., Brown, D. A., Hershkowitz, I., Orbach, Y., & Esplin, P. W. (2018). *Tell me what happened: Questioning children about abuse*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118881248>
- Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Esplin, P. W., & Horowitz, D. (2007). A structured forensic interview protocol improves the quality and informativeness of investigative interviews with children: A review of research using the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *31*(11-12), 1201–1231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.03.021>
- Lamb, M. E., Sternberg, K. J., Orbach, Y., Esplin, P. W., & Mitchell, S. (2002a). Is ongoing feedback necessary to maintain the quality of investigative interviews with allegedly abused children? *Applied Developmental Science*, *6*(1), 35–41. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0601_04
- Lamb, M. E., Sternberg, K. J., Orbach, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Horowitz, D., & Esplin, P. W. (2002b). The effects of intensive training and ongoing supervision on the quality of investigative interviews with alleged sex abuse victims. *Applied Developmental Science*, *6*(3), 114–125. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0603_2
- La Rooy, D., Brubacher, S. P., Aromäki-Stratos, A., Cyr, M., Hershkowitz, I., Korkman, J., Myklebust, T., Naka, M., Peixoto, C. E., Roberts, K. P., Stewart, H., & Lamb, M. E. (2015). The NICHD protocol: A review of an internationally used evidence-based tool for training child forensic interviewers. *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy, and Practice*, *1*(2), 76–89. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCRPP-01-2015-0001>
- Lyon, T. D., & Henderson, H. (2021). Increasing true reports without increasing false reports: Best practice interviewing methods and open-ended wh-questions. *APSAC Advisor*, *33*(1), 29–39.
- Middleton, J., Harris, L. M., Matera Bassett, D., & Nicotera, N. (2022). “Your soul feels a little bruised”: Forensic interviewers’ experiences of vicarious trauma. *Traumatology*, *28*(1), 74–83. <https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000297>
- Newlin, C., Cordisco Steele, L., Chamberlin, A., Anderson, J., Kenniston, J., Russell, A., Stewart, H., & Vaughn-Eden, V. (2015). Child forensic interviewing: Best practices. *OJJDP: Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, 1–17. US Department of Justice.
- Poole, D. A. (2016). *Interviewing children: The science of conversation in forensic contexts*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14941-000>
- Poole, D. A., & Bruck, M. (2012). Divining testimony? The impact of interviewing props on children’s reports of touching. *Developmental Review*, *32*(3), 165–180. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2012.06.007>
- Powell, M. B. (2013). An overview of current initiatives to improve child witness interviews about sexual abuse. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, *25*(2), 711–720. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2013.12035992>
- Powell, M. B. (2008). Designing effective training programs for investigative interviewers of children. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, *20*(2), 189–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2008.12035804>
- Powell, M. B., & Brubacher, S. P. (2020). The origin, experimental basis, and application of the standard interview method: An information-gathering framework. *Australian Psychologist*, *55*(6), 645–659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12468>

- Powell, M. B., & Snow, P. C. (2007). Guide to questioning children during the free-narrative phase of an investigative interview. *Australian Psychologist*, 42(1), 57–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00050060600976032>
- Price, H. L., & Roberts, K. P. (2011). The effects of an intensive training and feedback program on investigative interviews of children. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 43, 235–244.
- Pryce, J. G., Shackelford, K. K., & Pryce, D. H. (2007). *Secondary traumatic stress and the child welfare professional*. Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190615918.001.0001>
- Rischke, A., Roberts, K. P., & Price, H. L. (2011). Using spaced learning principles to translate knowledge into behavior: Evidence from investigative interviews of alleged child abuse victims. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 26, 58–67. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-010-9073-8>
- Saywitz, K. J., Wells, C. R., Rakel, P. L., & Hobbs, S. D. (2019). Effects of interviewer support on children’s memory and suggestibility: Systematic review and meta-analyses of experimental research. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20(1), 22–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838016683457>
- Schmidt, R. A., & Bjork, R. A. (1992). New conceptualizations of practice: Common principles in three paradigms suggest new concepts for training. *Psychological Science*, 3(4), 207–218. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1992.tb00029.x>
- Starcher, D. (2019). *“This is not easy work”: Examining burnout and secondary trauma among forensic interviewers* (Publication No. 13858001) [Master’s thesis, Arizona State University]. ProQuest Publishing.
- Sternberg, K. J., Lamb, M. E., Esplin, P. W., Orbach, Y., & Hershkowitz, I. (2002). Using a structured interview protocol to improve the quality of investigative interviews. In M. L. Eisen, J. A. Quas, & G. S. Goodman (Eds.), *Memory and suggestibility in the forensic interview* (pp. 409–436). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410602251>
- Stewart, H., Katz, C., & La Rooy, D. J. (2011). Training forensic interviewers. In M. E. Lamb, D. J. La Rooy, L. C. Malloy, & C. Katz (Eds.), *Children’s testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (pp. 199–216). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119998495.ch11>
- Williams, J. A., & Lee, H. (2021). Introduction to executive coaching. In *Executive coach 1.0 training guide* (3rd ed., pp. 7–30). Coach Training EDU.
- Wolfman, M., Brown, D., & Jose, P. (2018). The use of visual aids in forensic interviews with children. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 7(4), 587–596. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2018.06.004>
- Yii, S. L. B., Powell, M. B., & Guadagno, B. (2014). The association between investigative interviewers’ knowledge of question type and adherence to best-practice interviewing. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 19(2), 270–281. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lcrp.12000>

Appendix A

Developing Proficiency: Strategies For Skill Enhancement

Spaced Learning/Ongoing Professional Skill Development

In the realm of forensic interviewer skill development, the integration of **spaced learning** is paramount for fostering lasting competence. Ongoing learning, spaced over time with rest intervals, is more effective in long-term retention of material than instruction that is concentrated over a short period of time (Donovan & Radosevich, 1999; Schmidt & Bjork, 1992). Rather than relying solely on foundational training, a phased approach with periodic refresher courses and ongoing practice opportunities should be adopted. For instance, establishing regular intervals for skill reinforcement and self-assessment, along with receiving constructive feedback, can significantly enhance the efficacy of forensic interviewing practices. An illustrative study involving investigative interviewers showed that improvements in adherence to protocol components and question types were notably observed after refresher training, indicating the value of spaced learning in conjunction with feedback (Rischke et al., 2011).

Foundational research by Michael Lamb and colleagues emphasized the importance of intensive, spaced, and ongoing practice in training conditions, with benefits observed in group-level supervision and feedback (Lamb et al., 2002a; Lamb et al., 2002b; Price & Roberts, 2011). Recent studies, incorporating opportunities for ongoing spaced practice, self-reflection, and assessment, demonstrated the sustained maintenance of interview skills for at least six months post-training without intervening supervision (Benson & Powell, 2015; Brubacher et al., 2022; Cederborg et al., 2021).

This approach ensures that forensic interviewers not only acquire essential skills but also maintain and refine them over time. By acknowledging the value of spaced learning in the ongoing development of forensic interviewers, we can cultivate a workforce that not only meets immediate needs but is also equipped for sustained excellence in the intricate art of forensic interviewing.

Peer Review

Peer review is a facilitated discussion with other interviewers or team members and is intended to both maintain and increase desirable practices in forensic interviewing (Stewart et al., 2011). Professional peer review (PPR) is just one component of ongoing learning. Peer review falls into the category of deliberate practice that is central to learning. The literature along with other expert forensic interviewing professionals reiterate the fact that forensic interviewers need to have access to consistent and structured programming to receive feedback to enhance their interviewing skills. In the CAC movement, feedback is typically provided by participating in peer review. Peer review is a well-established activity for CAC forensic interviewers and documented participation is required for accreditation through the National Children's Alliance.

Research done on forensic interviewing peer review demonstrates that mere participation in peer review does not necessarily lead to increased performance in forensic interviews. Also, peer review based only on habits and opinions, rather than informed knowledge of questioning strategies, protocol adherence, and

social support may only reinforce current inadequate practice. Peer review is just one part of ongoing development for forensic interviewers. Feedback on interviewer performance must reflect standards of good practice and be targeted to the learning needs of an interviewer. CAC leaders and supervisors must support participation in peer review along with giving space and time for interviewers to develop the skills they are attempting to correct from peer review by engaging in deliberate reflection and practice.

Self-Review

Self-review is an important tool in developing the numerous skill sets interviewers need to master to become proficient and effective in their interviewing practice. Interviewers and their respective supervisors/mentors should ensure that time is routinely set aside for self-review. Unfortunately, for many interviewers, the only time self-review occurs is prior to testifying in court or participating in peer review. While these are important occasions for self-review, it is also critical that interviewers routinely and systematically review their own work. Areas of self-review focus may include identifying strengths and areas for improvement, adherence to protocol, managing obstacles during the interview, utilization of minimal encouragers (small gestures or verbal cues to indicate the interviewer is engaged) and social support, and identification of question/prompt types, and the quality of responses.

Regular practice of self-review can assist interviewers in developing their critical thinking skills regarding alternative engagement approaches, timing of questions/prompts, integration of known pre-interview information, and awareness of potential bias to apply to future interviews. Additionally, this practice may serve as a method of framing and grounding upcoming supervision/mentoring sessions. With interviewers and supervisors/mentors, individually and independently, reviewing the same interview prior to the meeting, a conversation with greater depth can occur. The self-review process can serve as an opportunity to chart the growth of the interviewer, increase self-awareness, identify specific training needs, and serve as a tangible and validating practice.

To optimize self-review, it is recommended to schedule uninterrupted sessions for watching and evaluating interviews, limiting distractions, and using a structured self-review form. Noting timestamps for areas of success or concern facilitates discussions with peers or supervisors during subsequent mentoring sessions. The regularity of self-review should be tailored to the interviewer's level, with level 1 interviewers suggested to review weekly, progressing to monthly for level 2 and 3 interviewers.

Appendix B

Navigating Diversity: Adapting Forensic Interviews For Special Populations And Abuse Type

Special Population	Features and Considerations	Why Specialized Training Is Needed
<i>Neurodivergent children</i>	There are differences in the way a child’s brain thinks, learns, and processes information.	Interviewers should understand how to adapt their pace, questioning and social support for children who are neurodivergent. This may increase the length of an interview or require the utilization of tools.
<i>Children who speak languages other than English/ utilization of interpreters</i>	Memories are encoded in the child’s native language. Therefore, whenever possible, children should be interviewed in their native language to allow for the best opportunity for them to provide accurate and complete information about their experience.	<p>Interviewers who conduct interviews in more than one language need to develop proficiency in conducting the interview in languages other than English. This requires additional training and supervision, ideally with support from other bilingual interviewers.</p> <p>When an interviewer fluent in the child’s native language is not available, interviewers must also understand how to use interpreters in the forensic interview. The preparation, planning, and logistics of incorporating an interpreter into the forensic interview need to be structured. Interviewers must have the ability to defend the utilization of an interpreter, if necessary.</p>
<i>Children who do not speak and adults with developmental challenges</i>	Gathering information from these populations can be extremely difficult.	If asked to conduct interviews for these populations, specialized training is required. The [Modell training-FIND] is a great resource.

Special Population	Features and Considerations	Why Specialized Training Is Needed
Pre-schoolers	Children between the ages of 3- to 5-years old, who are not old enough to go to school.	Due to the developmental limitations of this age group, interviewers need to be highly skilled on how to appropriately communicate, adapt the protocol, and be aware of the high risk of suggestibility. Pre-schoolers also have emotional needs that are not typically present in other age groups (e.g., separation anxiety).
Reluctant children	Children who are hesitant or unwilling to engage with the interviewer and/or to share details of their experience.	Interviewers need to know how to provide appropriate reassurance and social support to children who express reluctance while avoiding becoming coercive or suggestive. Interviewers also need to know when and how to end the interview.
Cultural considerations	Culture plays a role in the relationship between the interviewer and the child as well as in abuse dynamics, perceptions, and experiences.	Interviewers need to be aware of the diversity issues between the interviewer and the child and to develop skills to mitigate barriers. Interviewers must also understand how to explore the impact of culture on the child's experiences.
Adolescents	Transitional phase of growth between childhood and adulthood. Any person between the ages of 11 to 19.	When interviewing adolescents, knowledge of typical adolescent development in various domains (e.g., physical, psychological, social, emotional, cognitive) as well as the impact of trauma are crucial to developing skills for effective communication with this population.

Types of Cases	Why Specialized Training is Needed
<i>Child sexual exploitation and trafficking</i>	<p>Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) refers to a range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person.</p> <p>CSEC dynamics differ from other types of child abuse in many key ways. Interviewers must learn about the unique dynamics of these cases and ways to adapt the traditional forensic interview protocol to effectively engage with these youth.</p>
<i>Severe neglect/torture</i>	<p>Interviewers need to understand the complexities of severe neglect/torture, including the impact on the child and how to minimize triggers in the interview.</p>
<i>Witness to homicide/domestic violence (DV)/interpersonal violence (IPV)</i>	<p>Interviewers need to understand the power and control dynamics involved in DV/IPV cases as well as how to tailor the interview to gather the most comprehensive information from children who witness violence to and/or by their family members, extended family, caretakers, or acquaintances.</p>
<i>Youth with problematic sexual behavior (YPSB)</i>	<p>Interviewers need to be aware of the latest research and recommended guidelines for interviewing children who initiate behaviors involving sexual body parts (i.e., genitals, anus, buttocks, or breasts) that are developmentally inappropriate or potentially harmful to themselves or others .</p>
<i>Recantation</i>	<p>Interviewers need to understand the dynamics that contribute to recantation and learn how to effectively interview children who take back a disclosure of abuse, claiming it was a lie.</p>
<i>Follow-up interviews</i>	<p>In some cases, a single forensic interview is not sufficient to gather all the necessary information from a child victim or witness. In these cases, a follow-up interview may be indicated. Interviewers need to understand the considerations for conducting a follow-up interview and be able to provide guidance to the MDT when a follow-up interview is requested. Interviewers also need to learn how to conduct follow-up interviews, including the different approaches for second interviews versus extended forensic evaluations.</p>

Appendix C

Considerations For Testifying In Court

Forensic Interviewers may be called into court to testify, which varies based on jurisdiction. The following list includes topics that an interviewer may be asked to testify on depending on the skill level of the forensic interviewer, years of experience, training, knowledge, qualifications, and type of witness. If the interviewer holds any additional roles (mental health clinician, law enforcement, etc.) within the CAC or MDT, there may be additional topics the interviewer may be asked to testify on.

- Issues of coaching
- Testimony on characteristics consistent with abuse
- Dynamics of abuse
- Process of forensic interviewing
- Process of disclosure
- Memory and suggestibility
- Grooming and manipulation dynamics
- Recantation
- Rebuttal of defense expert

Note: Refer to the bibliography, "[Forensic Interviews at Trial](#)," for additional resources and research.

The following table lists some topics and suggestions for the forensic interviewer to consider prior to testifying.

Types of Cases	Why Specialized Training is Needed
<i>The basics</i>	What will you wear? Where do you sit? Who should you look at while testifying? Do you know where the courthouse is? Where will you park? Will you be sequestered? Do you know the courthouse's policies (e.g., cell phones allowed, etc.)?
<i>Conferring with person who subpoenaed you</i>	It is best practice to reach out to the individual who subpoenaed you prior to the court hearing. This will give you a better understanding of your role and an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification.
<i>Updating CV or resume</i>	Make sure to have an updated CV or resume that includes all your training and education relating to forensic interviewing. This might be required to qualify you as an "expert" witness.
<i>Reviewing the interview/case material</i>	Being prepared is paramount to being a good witness. Make sure you have an opportunity to review/watch the forensic interview you conducted and to read any case notes that will help you prepare.
<i>Purpose of court proceeding (motions, sentencing, rebuttal, etc.)</i>	Become aware of the different points throughout the court proceeding in which you might be utilized. It could happen outside of the trial itself during a motion hearing or sentencing or only for rebuttal.

Appendix D

Collaborative Strategies: Working Effectively With Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Partners

MDT members are collaborative partners during the forensic interview to ensure the interviewer is addressing all the allegations for the MDT to investigate. The forensic interviewer must strike a balance between acquiring the necessary description and clarification of alleged abuse for the MDT while maintaining a legally defensible interview and staying within the child's developmental abilities. The forensic interviewer is the expert in the area of forensic interviewing and is responsible for educating MDT partners on a child's developmental capabilities utilizing research from the field. The MDT partners may communicate to the interviewer the information they need to further the investigation and assist in making case-related decisions. The forensic interviewer discusses with the MDT what the child can provide in a developmentally and legally sound manner and is responsible for making decisions throughout the interview. Some of the investigative information is not appropriate to ask a child within the forensic interview, such as number of times the incident occurred, precise dates, etc. This information will need to be gathered in other manners or from other sources.

Forensic interviewers are not investigators and must keep their role clear both within the forensic interview and throughout the investigative process. Interviewers need to understand the investigative process to the extent that they fully comprehend the investigative partner's responsibilities and limitations throughout investigations. Case review participation is important for the forensic interviewer to provide information from the forensic interview as well as address the child's capacity to assist with problem-solving and decision-making for investigations.

Consider the following for building effective collaboration between the forensic interviewer and the MDT:

- Have the forensic interviewer shadow MDT members.
- Allow interviewers to sit in on police training to learn state statutes/codes.
- Thoroughly onboard all MDT partners.
- Have clear expectations for MDT partners as observers of the interview.
- Foster positive relationships with different MDT partners.



210 Pratt Avenue, NE, Huntsville, AL 35801

1-800-747-8122